



U.S. Highway 89 Corridor Plan



Joint Task Force/TAC Meeting #1
June 26, 2002
Oregon Trail Center
Montpelier, Idaho

Participants

Task Force

Conrad Michaelson, Bear Lake County Commissioner
Don Clark, Bear Lake County Commissioner
Eulalie Langford, State Representative
Ronald Jensen, Bear Lake County Planning and Zoning

TAC

Nicole Braspenickx, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Janice Engle, US Fish and Wildlife Service
Jim Mende, Idaho Fish and Game
Dave Hull, IDEQ
Erv Ballon, Idaho Department of Water Resources
W. Roger Warner, Idaho Department of Water Resources
Brent Bunn, Bear Lake County Sheriff
Don Edghill, City of St. Charles
Allen Harrison, Bear Lake Regional Commission
Craig Thomas, Bear Lake Regional Commission
Judy Holbrook, Bear Lake Convention and Visitors Bureau
Alan Wubker, ITD District 5 Environmental Planner
Denise Stark, ITD District 5 Environmental Planner
Terry Smith, ITD District 5 Area Maintenance Foreman

Citizens

Rae Crane
Glennie Mate
Lou Ann West
Arlene Hills

Staff

Judy Harmon, ITD District 5 Transportation Planner
Bob Schulte, DKS Associates
Tom Armstrong, Winterbrook Planning

Meeting Summary

Corridor Planning Process

Judy Harmon opened the meeting and thanked everyone for coming. She explained the purpose of the corridor plan is to develop a long-range, 20-year plan to guide future management and improvements to U.S. Highway 89, from the Utah state line through Montpelier. Corridor planning is a collaborative process with elected officials, business and property owners, citizens, and other stakeholders to determine the best course of action to guide management practices and improvement projects.

Judy Harmon explained that ITD starts each of their corridor plans with public meetings to identify issues to be addressed through the planning process. An open house was held yesterday from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Paris Elementary School. Today's meeting is the first meeting of the Task Force and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Both meetings will help identify the key issues and problems to be addressed. Judy stressed the importance of local collaboration, especially through participation in the Task Force and TAC meetings.

Judy Harmon explained the major steps in the corridor planning process: document existing conditions, forecast future needs, identify potential management strategies and improvement projects, and prioritize a final list of improvement projects.

Bob Schulte, DKS Associates' Project Manager, provided an overview of each task in the planning process and the 18-20 month schedule.

Discussion

Will the entire highway be improved to four-lanes or are other alternatives, such as passing lanes, being considered?

There are not set objectives at this time. All options will be considered and evaluated before the recommended options are selected.

What is the reason for stopping at the eastern edge of Montpelier?

The segment from Montpelier to Geneva is not included in the corridor plan because the planning and project development work that went into the current improvement project was equivalent to the analysis that will go into the corridor plan.

US 89 serves two functions – through traffic going from Logan to Jackson and local access. How will you account for those different needs?

The two different functions do create conflicts, primarily during the summer peak season. We will look at both and try to balance the two needs.

Does Utah have a similar plan?

Not that we are aware of, but it is clear we will need to coordinate with the state transportation department to make sure there is consistency.

Issues Discussion

Bob Schulte gave a brief overview of the issues raised in the stakeholder interviews and the open house. He asked for comments to either add to the list of issues that need to be addressed or to reinforce the importance of issues that already have been identified.

Overview

Montpelier – a traffic signal at 4th and Washington will be installed this fall; the stop sign at the 4th and Clay is a safety problem in that some vehicles on southbound US 89 run through without stopping.

Montpelier to Ovid – 65 mph speed limit may be too high with the adjacent uses; the roadway is narrow and does not have shoulders, which creates a safety problem if vehicles break down.

Ovid Curve – Number 1 issue with poor design, poor sight distances, and the Highway 36 eastbound stop sign is confusing, especially for people from out-of-the-area.

Ovid to Paris – narrow road with poor sight distances due to vertical curves (hills), 65 mph speed limit may be too high with adjacent residential and farm equipment exiting and entering the highway; suggestion to convert old rail line to bike trail from Montpelier to Paris.

Paris – 65 mph speed limit within city limits may be too high and creates a safety problem for residents (especially children) and school buses.

Paris to St. Charles – in good condition; one suggestion to add a bike lane to connect Bear Lake to Paris (to connect to rail line trail) to Montpelier.

North Beach Road intersection – high volume, high speeds, and poor sight distances create congestion and safety problems; offset with Minnetonka Cave Rd intersection.

St. Charles – consider reduction of speed limits within city limits.

Fish Haven – a lot of comments; congestion created by peak summertime visitors; too many driveways with direct access onto highway; no space for road widening; a growing problem; and a suggested alternative route from St. Charles to Beaver Canyon.

Discussion

Are there any plans for the Montpelier Overpass? It is narrow and provides the only access to Montpelier from the south.

No plans, but we can add it to the list and take a closer look. It depends on the future traffic volumes.

Is the Fish Haven alternative route under serious consideration?

None of the alternatives or options are being eliminated at this point. We need to look at existing and future conditions, then analyze alternatives to see what makes sense.

What are the unique issues with seasonal, tourism-related traffic?

Peak season traffic creates congestion and safety conflicts. Buses, RVs, and trucks pulling boats, and passenger vehicles create conflicts as they pull on and off the highway.

Any traffic counts may need to be adjusted (upwards) because traffic is down due to a low water year and the Logan Canyon road construction.

Do we need to consider an alternative route around Montpelier?

It depends on the problem or conflicts that you are trying to address. If it is conflicts with truck traffic, most of it is on US 30 not US 89. Many businesses are dependent on the traffic volumes. Also, it is more cost effective to try to address conflicts by improving the existing road. Options include realignment of the US 89 junction and the old US 30 route.

Are the problems in Fish Haven created by a lack of enforcement of the speed limits.

Enforcement is only part of the solution. Need to look at sight distances and access. There is not much space for improvements.

The Fish Haven Creek bridge is a problem. The narrow bridge does not have a shoulder, which means pedestrians and bicycles cross in the roadway. A walkway/bike lane would be a big improvement.

The Ovid Curve needs a blinking/flashing light on Highway 36 to warn drivers.

How do we get the speed limits lowered?

This is an issue that can be addressed outside of the corridor planning process. The best place to start is the regional transportation coalition meets quarterly to discuss and resolve transportation issues. The coalition includes Bear Lake, Franklin, Caribou, Oneida, and eastern Bannock counties. Follow-up is likely to include additional speed studies by the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD). Also, a city may establish its own speed limits. Again, the procedure starts with an ITD speed study and recommendation, which the city considers as part of its deliberations.

Bear Lake West to Fish Haven needs lower speed limits and turn lanes.

How can we create awareness of the road conditions with so much of the traffic tourism-related?

Signage is the best, but too many signs or lights create confusion.

The bike path in Garden City should be extended through Fish Haven to North Beach Road.

There are cattle and farm equipment conflicts from St. Charles to Ovid.

Options include wider shoulders, passing lanes, or frontage roads.

Bear Lake needs scenic viewpoints and pullouts.

Alternative routes through Fish Haven have been studied in the past. These did not go all the way to the National Forest, just behind the first row of house fronting the existing highway. We need to move fast before major developments are under construction.

We need to think long term in Fish Haven. The congestion is going to get worse. On the Utah side, there are residential uses all the way from Garden City to the summit. Utah might be interested in the alternative route to reduce those conflicts.

The winter season is seeing an increasing number of visitors. Bear Lake and Beaver Creek has been rated one of the best places for snowmobiles.

Winter conditions are treacherous. Ovid to Bloomington have a problem with snow drifts. There has been some difficulty getting access to private land to create snow fences or snow dikes.

Birding is becoming more popular and the Bear Lake Refuge is a potential visitor destination. We should look at increase access (at appropriate times) to the refuge.

Jim Mende, Idaho Fish and Game, explained that road improvements increase speeds, which increase conflicts with big game. They are seeing a shift from deer to elk and moose. On the east side of Bear Lake, the deer population is stable or in decline. The west side has more elk and moose, which migrate further than deer. The big game use the transition range and come down into the farms and cross the highway mostly in winter. The large elk and moose create more damage when hit by cars. Terry Smith, ITD Road Maintenance Foreman, reported that last year 127 deer, 48 elk, and 9 moose were killed on area highways. So far this year, 7 moose have been killed.

Janice Engle, US Fish and Wildlife Service, noted that this is a potential concern for bald eagles, which feed on the carrion. She said the federally protected threatened and endangered species in the area are bald eagle, Canadian lynx, and gray wolf.

Jim Mende noted the Bear Lake Cutthroat Trout has limited spawning habitat. There is some in St. Charles creek. It is possible to restore some habitat in Fish Haven Creek if a barrier (flume) is removed.

Next Steps

Bob Schulte explained that the consultants would be documenting existing traffic conditions, forecasting future conditions, and documenting land use and environmental conditions. A draft report is expected by late September with another open house scheduled for early October.

Judy Harmon asked for recommendations on other people to include on the Task Force or TAC. It was suggested that representatives from Utah be added, such as a Rich County Commissioner and/or the mayor of Garden City. Allen Harrison offered to help coordinate those contacts. Mark Parker, Bear Lake Ambulance coordinator, also was suggested.

Judy Harmon asked for preferences for meeting times. Most TAC members preferred daytime. The Task Force members present did not express a preference.

Next Meeting:

Early October